

Printed for the War Cabinet. August 1944.

167

SECRET.

Copy No. 36

W.P. (44) 434.

8th August, 1944.

WAR CABINET.

HUNGARIAN OFFER TO ALLOW JEWS TO LEAVE HUNGARY.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

Admiral Horthy recently informed the International Red Cross representative in Budapest that, provided accommodation could be found by His Majesty's Government and the United States Government, the Hungarian authorities would be prepared to allow all Jewish children under 10 years of age in possession of visas for foreign countries, and all Jews, both adults and children, covered by Palestine immigration certificates to leave Hungary. Meanwhile, all deportation of Jews to Poland would cease. We consulted the United States Government on this subject and their reply is contained in Washington telegram No. 4118 (Annex I).

2. The Hungarian offer appears to be genuine, the United States Government are pressing His Majesty's Government urgently for a decision, and it would seem to be desirable that the offer should be accepted with the least possible delay (see Washington telegram No. 4238 (Annex II)). The question of acceptance or rejection was discussed at a meeting of the War Cabinet Committee on Refugees held on the 4th August (J.R. (44) 21). The meeting, faced with the dilemma of—

- (a) refusing to accept the "Horthy offer" either jointly with the United States Government or separately and thus possibly arousing hostile public opinion here and in the United States; or
- (b) accepting the "Horthy offer" and risking civil war in Palestine owing to an inroad of Jews from Hungary into the Levant;

reached no conclusion. I could not be present.

3. The Secretary of State for the Colonies objected strongly to the arrangements proposed by the International Red Cross whereby 41,000 Jews would shortly leave Hungary for ~~Turkey~~ via Roumania, and the general feeling of the meeting was against joining with the United States Government in "signing a blank cheque which we could not honour." Sir Frank Newsam, on behalf of the Home Office, agreed with the Foreign Office view that we should accept the "Horthy offer" as a gesture, informing the Americans at the same time that they must not face us with the impossible in the question of providing accommodation.

4. It was also pointed out that the offer might be inspired by Hitler, who would wish to create fundamental difficulties for the Allies in the Near East by allowing an exodus of Jews.

5. The meeting finally decided that the above-mentioned dilemma should be referred to the War Cabinet, and in the meantime interim telegrams have been sent to Washington instructing His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires to inform the State Department that we cannot decide without some further delay.

6. It is possible that the United States arguments put forward in Washington telegram No. 4118 against inviting the Intergovernmental Committee to co-operate are inspired by a fear that the Intergovernmental Committee might steal the thunder of the War Refugee Board. It is, however, the view of the Foreign Office that as a practical measure the Intergovernmental

Committee should be brought in. Co-operation through the Committee with the neutrals, Sweden and Switzerland, would be helped by their association with the Committee. The Directorate of the Committee need presumably only consult with those governments whose co-operation would be helpful. It is untrue to say that "any" reference to the Committee would be interpreted in Axis Europe as a delaying gesture because reference to the Committee could take place simultaneously with the Anglo-American acceptance of the offer as proposed above. Nor is it true to say that to invite the co-operation of the Intergovernmental Committee would jeopardise lives. The United States Government presumably mean that lives would be jeopardised by delay but reference to the Committee would not necessarily mean delay if reference were to be simultaneous with acceptance. On this supposition also, reference to the Committee would not enable the Hungarian Government to proclaim virtual refusal of its offer. Further, our proposed appeal to Latin American Governments (see Foreign Office telegram to Washington 6588, Annex III) should not be brushed aside on the plea that there is no time to make it.

7. Accommodation is at least as difficult to find as transport. The Foreign Office have recently been examining the possibility of establishing a transit refugee centre in the Mediterranean area where Jews emigrating from Hungary could be received. There are already camps at Fedhala and Philippeville in French North Africa and the French Authorities might be unwilling to consent to the establishment of a further camp. With very considerable difficulty and against the wishes of our Military Authorities we have arranged for the establishment of a camp in Tripolitania. The camps originally started in Egypt under the Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration have lately been expanded considerably in order to take in some thousands of Jewish refugees who have reached Southern Italy from Yugoslavia. The Colonial Office are understood to oppose the establishment of such a transit camp in Palestine or Syria where in any event several camps already exist and Cyprus can take no more refugees. The only possibility would appear to be Sicily, suggested a short time ago by President Roosevelt but apparently rejected by the British and American Military Authorities in the Mediterranean. The view of the Foreign Office is that the immediate problem presented by the flow of Jewish refugees into the Levant may become so acute that as a practical measure the establishment of a transit camp in Syria should be immediately considered. The Dominion Governments are being consulted in regard to the provision of permanent destinations.

8. We could agree with the United States Government that an acceptance of the Hungarian offer to release Jews should be widely published.

9. The draft of a telegram which I propose should be sent to Washington is attached (Annex IV).

10. In view of the important political issues involved, an early War Cabinet decision seems essential.

A. E.

Foreign Office, 8th August, 1944.

ANNEX I.

Sir R. I. Campbell to Mr. Eden.

(No. 4118.)
(Telegraphic.)

Washington, 1st August, 1944.

YOUR telegram No. 6773.

State Department had already received similar communication from International Committee of Red Cross in Washington and have considered it in conjunction with statement of your views furnished them by us on basis of your telegrams Nos. 6509 and 6588. They consider Hungarian offer to be genuine and feel that it should be accepted forthwith.

2. Following is summary of relevant passages of memorandum received from State Department on 31st July :—

- (a) Proposal *must* be accepted as quickly as possible in order to save the largest number of lives possible.
- (b) It is unlikely that refugees can be moved from Hungary in such numbers or with such speed that the Allies cannot cope with the situation as it develops. Our reply should therefore not be couched in terms of numbers for whom refuge can be found in specified countries nor should acceptance await calculation of other possible places of asylum.
- (c) Obligation of accepting Hungarian proposal is responsibility of United States and United Kingdom Governments, *which must act immediately* without waiting to consult or enlist the aid of other Governments. Proposal should not be handled through Inter-Governmental Committee in view of delay inevitably entailed by consultation with other members of that organisation, some of whom moreover are neutrals. Furthermore, any reference to Inter-Governmental Committee would be interpreted in Axis Europe as delaying gesture, would jeopardise lives and would enable the Hungarian Government to proclaim virtual refusal of its offer by us. Similarly there is no time to consult Latin American Governments.
- (d) United States and United Kingdom Governments "in conjunction should forthwith request International Committee of Red Cross to advise the Hungarian Government that the two Governments will undertake to care for all Jews who are permitted to leave Hungary and who reach neutral or United Nations territory." Clear statement to this effect should be published. Accommodation for considerable number can be found immediately, additional accommodation can be found as the movement develops. Main problem is one of transportation. Basic responsibility is British and American but assistance of other Governments and international organisations can be enlisted later.

3. United States Government accordingly proposes—

- (a) To request International Committee of Red Cross to advise the Hungarian Government that United States Government is prepared to arrange for havens of refuge for all Jews who are permitted to leave Hungary and who reach neutral or United Nations territory.
- (b) To make public in the widest and most effective manner possible this (preferably jointly) acceptance of Hungarian proposal.

4. My immediately following telegram contains text of message which United States Government proposes to send to International Committee of Red Cross, Geneva, not later than 7th August. They attach the greatest possible importance to His Majesty's Government taking parallel action and hope to receive assent of His Majesty's Government before 7th August in order that their telegram may indicate joint action. In the meantime they have informed International Committee, Red Cross, Washington, that they are consulting us.

5. Foreign Office please pass to Jerusalem as my telegram No. 23.

ANNEX II.

Sir R. I. Campbell to Mr. Eden.

(No. 4238.)

(Telegraphic.)

Washington, 7th August, 1944.

MY telegram No. 4207.

State Department have now stated that United States Government agree in view of the considerations set forth in your telegram No. 6935 to postpone action until 10th August. They emphasised, however, their fear of untoward results that any further delay must produce and say they cannot possibly defer action any longer than that.

ANNEX III.

Mr. Eden to Sir R. I. Campbell (Washington).

(No. 6588.)

(Telegraphic.)

Foreign Office, 22nd July, 1944.

WE have as yet received no reply to our request for official confirmation of Press reports that Hungarian Government are willing to allow departure of Jews from Hungary, especially children and holders of Palestine immigration certificates.

2. If offer is genuine we propose to advise Intergovernmental Committee that there is now a chance of arranging departure of children from Hungary in lieu of those whom it has proved impossible to get out of France.

3. Representatives of the Jewish Agency appear to be about to exert heavy pressure in favour of greatly increased Jewish immigration to Palestine as a corollary to the offer of the Hungarian Government. Possibilities of Palestine immigration are, however, limited: such as exist will be urgently examined in connexion with this new development, but the possibility of finding alternative destinations must, we think, be examined without delay.

4. The recently proposed camp in Tripolitania is for Yugoslavs only and cannot be greatly enlarged, though additions here, as well as at Fedhala and Philippeville will be looked into at once.

5. Please convey above information to State Department. Possibilities are—

- (a) United States Government would be prepared to accept more Jewish refugees in the United States;
- (b) United States should join with His Majesty's Government in asking Latin American Republics to accept more Jewish refugees;
- (c) joint approach should be made to Portuguese Government with a view to finding asylum in Angola.

6. For your own information we are consulting Dominion Governments.

7. It might be most convenient both for United Kingdom and United States Governments if whole problem of alternative destinations arising out of Horthy's offer were remitted to Intergovernmental Committee. Please ascertain United States Government's views on this.

ANNEX IV.

*Draft Telegram to His Majesty's Ambassador, Washington.**Foreign Office, August, 1944.*

MY telegram No. 7027 [of 7th August: Hungarian offer to release Jews].

His Majesty's Government agree that the Hungarian offer should be accepted and are ready to make a joint declaration with the United States Government to that effect. Terms of declaration will, of course, have to be agreed between us.

2. It cannot, however, be sufficiently emphasised that British capacity to accommodate refugees, as United States Government know, has now become

limited, and thus, while we accept an indefinite commitment in order to meet the wishes of the United States Government, we count on them not to face us with the impossible in practice.

3. Accommodation is at least as difficult to find as transport. We have recently examined the possibility of establishing a transit refugee centre in the Mediterranean area where Jews emigrating from Hungary could be received. As the United States Government are aware, there are already camps at Fedhala and Philippeville in French North Africa and the French Authorities might be unwilling to consent to the establishment of a further camp. With very considerable difficulty and against the wishes of our Military Authorities, we have arranged for the establishment of a camp in Tripolitania. The camps originally started in Egypt under the Middle East Relief and Refugee Administration have lately been expanded considerably in order to take in some thousands of Jewish refugees who have reached Southern Italy from Yugoslavia. Please obtain views of State Department regarding the possibility of using Sicily as an asylum in accordance with a suggestion which it will be remembered was made a short time ago by President Roosevelt. We will telegraph as soon as possible what accommodation His Majesty's Government can find for refugees. The practical difficulties of dealing with a large flow of refugees which might arrive at, *e.g.*, Constantza, in the expectation of reaching Palestine are great and a dangerous position might arise if promises were to be given which could not be immediately fulfilled.

4. We would urge that as a practical measure the services of the Inter-governmental Committee should be used in making at least some arrangements for evacuation, especially of Jewish children. The Committee have considerable experience in handling this question and co-operation through the Committee with the neutrals Sweden and Switzerland would be helped by their association with it. The Directorate of the Committee need presumably only consult with those Governments whose co-operation would be helpful. It is not thought that reference to the Committee would be interpreted in Axis Europe as a delaying gesture if reference to the Committee were to take place simultaneously with Anglo-American acceptance of the offer as proposed above. Similarly, in that event, lives would not be jeopardised, nor would reference to the Committee enable the Hungarian Government to proclaim virtual refusal of its offer.

5. We would again urge that, in view of the extreme difficulty of finding accommodation for Jewish refugees from Hungary, the United States Government and His Majesty's Government should jointly approach Latin American Governments as proposed in my telegram No. 6588 [of 22nd July].

6. Please make necessary communication to State Department on above lines.
